

# Cass County Soil Conservation District

## Winter Conservation News

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### *Tree of the Quarter:* Highbush Cranberry

(*Viburnum trilobum*) is not a true cranberry. A member of the honeysuckle family, Highbush Cranberry will grow to 12' tall. The leaves are deeply 3-lobed, with coarse teeth. They turn a beautiful red-dish-purple in the Autumn. Berry-like drupes grow from white flowers that develop in June and July, containing a single stone. Eaten raw, the fruit is quite

tart, but cooked into sauces, jellies and juices it has a wonderful taste very similar to cranberry. If the fruit is not harvested, it will remain on the bush well into winter. A variety of wildlife including deer, fox, grouse, pheasants, and songbirds will eat the fruit, but generally only after it has been frozen and thawed several times. Highbush cranberry grows best in wet woods, along streams and on moist hillsides. It is easy to grow and is quite adaptable to a variety of soils and acidity. This shrub grows best in moist, well-drained soils. Highbush Cranberry is available through the Tree Store in conservation grade stock and can be planted in machine plantings as well.

### *Mark your calendars!*



Plan on attending our annual Ladies' Ag event, being held on March 19th, 2020 at the Fargo Air Museum.

Doors open at 4:30 pm. This year we are excited to have **Sabrina Hornung**, editor of the High Plains Reader, as our featured speaker. She will be discussing art and rural communities. Ladies' Ag brings together multiple generations of women involved in rural and urban agriculture production and land management. Attendees enjoy a social hour and supper, entertainment, and raffle items. The proceeds from the raffle tickets goes directly back into the Ladies' Ag Night fund. This event is **FREE** to ladies who are invested in rural and urban conservation. Participants may register for this event at the Cass County Soil Conservation District website or by calling the District at (701) 282-2157 extension 3.

### **District Staff**

Jeffrey Miller—*Director*  
Amy Cole—*Office Manager*  
Eric Dahl—*Soil and Water Resources Mgr*  
Tony Peterson—*Programs Manager*

### **NRCS Staff**

Josh Monson—*District Conservationist*  
Matt Shappell—*Soil Conservationist*  
Matt Waclawik—*Wetlands Specialist*  
Blake Johnson—*Agriculture Engineer*  
Paul Flahave—*Designated Conservationist*  
Tim Cogger—*Program Assistant*  
Amy Bauroth—*Heartland Secretary*

### **District Supervisors**

Terry Hoffmann—*Wheatland*  
Brad Kellerman—*West Fargo*  
Curt Knutson—*Page*  
Brooks Whitmore—*Page*  
Warren Solberg—*Horace*



# *Annual Report: 2019 was yet another great year for conservation in Cass County!*

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- ✓ The District worked closely with our partners NRCS and FSA in setting up EQIP, and CSP contracts that involved either tree plantings or grass plantings. In addition, the **Cass County Windbreak Planting Initiative (CWPI)** continue to be very popular. We would like to thank all the cooperators in the county for giving the District the opportunity to apply conservation to their land. The District assisted these cooperators in planting over **170,000 LF** of trees and installed over **135,000 LF** of weed barrier. Almost **65,000 trees and shrubs** were planted in Cass County in 2019.
- ✓ Our **Eco-Ed** outdoor educational program was held at Brewer Lake County Park on September 26th. 68 students from Central Cass School enjoyed a beautiful day while rotating through the five stations: Water Quality, Woodlands, Prairie, Wetlands, and Soils. The Red River Zoo finished the day off with a wonderful presentation.
- ✓ The **Maple River Watershed Project** is open for sign-up and we are continuously accepting cost-share applications for management practices in the Maple River Watershed. This is the second year of the Project so if you are interested in cost share, be sure to sign up for the 2020 growing season. Practices include livestock management, cover crop, grass and tree establishment, septic system renovations, and more.
- ✓ The **Urban Conservation** program continues to expand. We took on many great projects throughout our community and held several community educational workshops including the construction of rain barrels and compost tumblers. The Pocket Prairie Initiative, Community Garden Grant, and Pollinator plantings continue to be popular. We are continuously accepting applications, so contact us today!
- ✓ In March, the District held the annual **Ladies Ag Night** at the Fargo Air Museum. The event featured Elisa Korenne, singer/songwriter/writer, as the keynote speaker. Ladies Ag Night is a special event to show appreciation for all the ladies that are involved with agriculture in Cass County.
- ✓ The District participated in the **Living Ag Classroom** program which was held at the Red River Valley Fairgrounds. This event educates approximately 2000 Cass County 4th graders on various agriculture and conservation practices.
- ✓ The District had a booth at the **Home and Garden Show** at the FargoDome. During this event, we meet many new people and discuss with them about the many services the District has to offer.
- ✓ The District had a booth at the **Big Iron Farm Show**. Big Iron gives us a great opportunity to discuss soil conservation with the producers that stop by the booth. During the show we also displayed our tree planting equipment at our shop at the fairgrounds.
- ✓ District Director Jeffrey Miller gave a presentation on gardening at the May **"First Friday's at B."**
- ✓ The District planted **Little Free Garden #226** at the office.
- ✓ The District presented "River Meanders" at the annual **Riverkeepers' Water Festival**. Thousands of area school children attended the 5 day event.
- ✓ The District hosted the **Urban Conservation Outreach Workshop**. Employees from around the state attended to learn more about Urban Conservation.
- ✓ The District partnered with Audubon Dakota and the NRCS for a demonstration at the **Fargo Street Fair**.

## *Quote of the Quarter:*

"It must be winter in my heart

There's nothing warm in here at all

I miss the summer and the spring

The floating yellow leaves of fall"

*The Avett Brothers*

*All in all, it was a very productive and busy year. We look forward to working with producers and organizations to help Cass County continue to make strides in conservation!*



## *Trees for Flood Prone Areas*

2019 will go down in the books as one wacky weather year. The rain began early and didn't let up. While the early moisture was great for trees, some areas had significant flooding late in the year that was hard on young trees. If you are planting trees near a river, creek, wetland, or area that can see significant standing water during the growing year, don't despair. There are some species that can not only live through those events, but thrive.

When looking at trees, there are a variety of species that will do well in wet soils. Boxelder and Native Cottonwood prefer moist soils, but will struggle in standing water. When planning species for very wet locations, look no further than the willow family. Willows have no problem surviving when their roots are wet. Two species to look into include Laurel Leaf and Peachleaf willow.

**Laurel Leaf:** This tree is native to Europe and Asia, but has thrived in North America. This willow is among the first to leaf out and the last to drop leaves during the growing season. It's a medium-sized tree, growing to 40 feet tall. Laurel leaf willow has attractive glossy green leaves and a rounded crown.

**Peachleaf:** The second largest native prairie tree, the Peachleaf willow is an overstory dominant species in riparian ecosystems throughout the West. A fast grower, the peachleaf is a small tree, topping out around 25 feet in height. This is an excellent choice for a native riparian planting.

There are a few excellent shrub options as well for wet areas. Two of the best are Redosier Dogwood and False Indigo.

**Redosier Dogwood:** This lovely reddish native shrub loves moist soils. It grows fast up to 10 feet tall, producing berries that a variety of wildlife love to eat in the winter. A wonderful choice for wet areas.

**False Indigo:** A native legume, the False Indigo prefers wet soils. Though subject to periodic die backs, it will thrive in riparian corridors. Tropical in appearance, this unique plant has also shown resistance to deer browsing, making it an excellent choice in areas our four-legged friends use tree plantings as a buffet line.

If you are struggling to get trees and shrubs to grow in wet areas, please give us a call. Our Certified Technical Assistance (CTA) is free-of-charge and we can develop a workable plan for your property. In addition, all of these species are available through our Conservation Tree Store.

## Upcoming Events

December 25th— **Christmas Day:** Office Closed

January 1st— **New Year's Day:** Office Closed

January 21st— **Board Meeting:** Fargo Field Office

January 20th— **MLK Day:** Office Closed

February 17th— **Presidents' Day:** Office Closed

February 18th— **Board Meeting:** Fargo Field Office

2/28-29, 3/1: **Home and Garden Show:** FargoDome

March 19th: **Ladies Ag:** Fargo Air Museum



## *Winter Pruning*

Cabin fever tends to hit hardest around late winter, at least in my house. Desperate to get the kids and myself out of the house, we bundle up and hit the new shelterbelt behind our house. Armed with a pruner and a little knowledge, the pruning begins.

Late winter/early spring is an excellent time to prune woody plants. They are still dormant with reduced sap flow. By removing branches, the root energy will be expended in the remaining woody tissue and create new growth. An exception to this are maples and birches. The sap begins to run early in those species, so pruning is best done after full leaf out.

There are some easy guidelines to remember when pruning. Remove weak branches, branches that grow downward, and any branches that appear to be dead. On younger trees, the location of the cut is very important. Branches should be removed just outside the branch collar, not into it. Small pruning wound heal faster than large ones, so limit cutting off large branches unless needed for safety or property protection. As trees grow less vigorously than shrubs, 25% or less of the leaf area should be removed at one time. While it seems like a good idea to apply wound dressings on pruning cuts, research has not shown any advantage to them. Instead of buying wound dressings, save the money to buy more trees!

Shrubs can be approached much differently than trees. On some species, the entire shrub can be cut back to 4 inch stubs. Shrubs such as lilacs, willows, and dogwood can be *coppiced*, or cut to stubs, to promote new growth and vigor. It seems like an unnecessarily violent act to chop down these shrubs, but the heart of the tree is in the roots, and they will respond by producing glorious new growth. Other shrubs such as golden currant, nanking cherry, nannyberry and elderberry can benefit by a healthy pruning, but stopping short of total coppicing.

Some work in the late winter/early spring can benefit both the trees and humans caring for them. You will be amazed at the response when the leaves pop and Spring arrives!





## *Life Beneath the Snow*

Once Old Man Winter puts a firm grip on the countryside, it's easy to notice obvious wildlife adaptations to the snow. Animals grow thicker, warmer coats and dig through the snow to find food. However, it's not so easy to see the life *beneath* the snow. This seldom-seen environment is called the subnivean zone.

A blanket of freshly fallen snow is the perfect canvas to begin to understand the subnivean zone. Follow a set of mouse tracks and soon enough they will usually disappear into a hole in the snow. This Houdini-like escape is the doorway to an entire world for the mouse, as well as their fellow rodent the vole.

The subnivean zone is created in a couple different ways. Vegetation, trees and branches, and other debris can hold up snow, creating a void between the snow and ground. In addition, when snow is warmed by the ground it sublimates into water vapor, with that vapor moving up into the snowpack. The confluence of water vapor and colder upper air results in small ice particles that act as a roof near the ground. Either way, the subnivean zone's temperature stays right around 32 degrees.



Nature abhors a vacuum, and small animals readily adapt to this ecosystem. Out of site from predators both avian and terrestrial, they are free to eat seeds, bark, plants, and grass under the snow. Mice and voles will even cache food in areas to ensure a steady supply of food in the leaner times. Of course, often times the surrounding area beneath the snow will be denuded of vegetation, and the animals will go topside, out of their protective world. This not only ensures fresh food but acts as vents to release carbon dioxide that builds up both by the animal's respiration as well as CO<sub>2</sub> released from the ground. These tunnels are easily seen during thaws, as winding trails or beaten down grass.

The snow doesn't offer unbreakable armor from predators, however. Ermine are small slender predators that can slip through the subnivean zone to find prey. Once prey is found, the ermine is a quick and efficient killer. Fox, coyotes and owls hunt from the topside of the snow. Having a very good sense of hearing, they can hear the rustling of the small animals through feet of snow. Owls will slash their talons through the snow to grasp prey. Fox, collecting their energy in their back legs, will leap skyward, coming down head and paw first on the sound with teeth barred. Winter is a hungry time for predators, and they will go through a lot of work for that tender morsel of rodent meat.

Next time you are in a forest or prairie in the winter, dig down near the ground and marvel at the unseen life of the subnivean layer.

## *Pay My Bill*

You can now pay your bill online! Click **PAY MY BILL** on the homepage and enjoy the convenience!

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